British Waterways

BRITISH WATERWAYS - Leisure & Tourism

When they were built in the 18th century, Britain's inland waterways represented a cutting-edge transport network for the country's heavy industry and inland freight carrying. The decline in traditional industry in the early 20th century coincided with a rise in interest in the waterways' potential for leisure. Early enthusiasts such as Tom Rolt and Robert Aickman not only launched a popular restoration movement, but also pioneered holiday boating on the country's hidden network of canals and rivers and led to a whole new generation discovering the waterways.

Today the waterways are visited by more people, and enjoyed for a wider variety of activities, than at any other time in their history. Half the population of the UK lives within five miles of one of British Waterways' canals or rivers and 10 million people visit them each year – as boaters, walkers, cyclists, anglers, nature lovers or visitors to waterside bars and restaurants. Already a valued leisure resource for many, British Waterways plans to double the number of visitors to the waterway network by 2012.

In 2003 British Waterways launched www.waterscape.com, the complete online guide to leisure on and around the waterways. In partnership with other organisations including The Environment Agency and Broads Authority, www.waterscape.com provides a comprehensive guide to Britain's canals, rivers, lakes and lochs and includes news updates, detailed maps, suggestions for days out at waterway attractions and information on activities such as walking, cycling and angling on waterways. The site also features booking facilities for a range of waterside holidays and breaks, from self-drive narrowboats to waterside cottages and hotels.

In 2004 British Waterways is a major partner in Visit Britain's 'Enjoy England' campaign, designed to encourage people to rediscover the delights of a traditional holiday, short break or day out at home rather than abroad. British Waterways cares for more than 2,000 miles of canals and rivers throughout the country, ranging from beautiful rural landscapes to waterways in bustling towns and historic cities. Canals and rivers are an important aspect of the British leisure experience and participation in 'Enjoy England' will enable BW to promote the experience to a wide and interested audience. Other key campaign partners include The National Trust and English Heritage.

British Waterways has championed free access to the waterways for more than 30 years and is committed to maintaining access for all of its waterways. Today the network is enjoying an unprecedented period of growth, with waterways having recently been restored at the same rate as they were being built in their 18th century heyday. As part of this growth, and with the support of

the national lottery and other partners, British Waterways has developed a number of major tourist attractions to broaden interest in the waterways and bring increased economic benefits for communities. Flagship tourist attractions include: Anderton Boat Lift in Cheshire, Standedge Tunnel in the Pennines and The Falkirk Wheel in Scotland. British Waterways is also in the process of forming a waterside pub PPP to develop and invest in a network of waterside pubs that will improve the visitor experience and earn an income for reinvestment in the waterways.

British Waterways also has a role to play in the Government's aim of improving the nation's health and wellbeing. Canals and rivers provide unique opportunities for increasing the physical activity of local communities, particularly in urban areas where outdoor resources are often limited.

Boating

British Waterways is the UK's leading navigation authority, with responsibility for 2,000 miles (3,704km) of canals, rivers and docks, hosting 26,000 licensed boats. Most of the boats on the waterways today are leisure craft - including private boats, hire boats, trip boats, hotel boats and restaurant boats as well as unpowered rowing boats and canoes. The variety of craft is enormous and is an essential – and colourful – reminder of the network's past and present popularity. British Waterways works closely with tourist authorities and the hire boat industry to promote holidays afloat and also manages marinas and canal basins as visitor destinations in their own right.

Fishing

Anglers have used canals since the earliest days and, today, British Waterways is the UK's largest owner and manager of coarse fisheries. Especially noted for their roach, carp, bream, and perch – as well as more recent introductions, such as the alien Zander – the waterways play host to some one million anglers each year. Stretches of waters are usually leased to angling clubs which control day-to-day fishing. However, most clubs allow non-members to fish their waters for a daily fee. British Waterways encourages young anglers through specially organised free fishing days, and continues to develop specialist fisheries with access for disabled anglers.

Cycling

Cycling is growing in popularity in Britain and many cyclists enjoy riding alongside the country's historic waterways. British Waterways cares for more than 1,500 miles of towpaths, which offer attractive routes for cyclists in urban and rural areas.

Originally designed to allow horses to tow canal boats, not all towpaths are suitable for cycling. However, British Waterways is working with cycling groups and local authorities to improve many stretches of towpath and so to expand the mileage available to cyclists.

Walking

Millions of people walk along British Waterways' towpaths every year – for leisurely strolls, local nature trails or long-distance hikes. Cutting through beautiful countryside and showing hidden views of our towns and cities, these towpaths now provide peaceful, linear parks within easy reach of half the population of the UK. British Waterways' local offices publish leaflets on nature trails, walks and guided tours and, in the summer months, they also arrange guided walks and open days. British Waterways is also working with disability access charity, The Fieldfare Trust, to improve access to the waterways for disabled visitors.

Fast facts

- 10 million visitors each year make 160 million visits to the waterways
- 2 million visits by boaters and their passengers
- 2.6 million visits by anglers
- 100,000 visitors to waterway events
- 7.2 million visits by cyclists
- 1.5 million visits by canoeists and other unpowered boaters
- 26,000 boats licensed on British Waterways' network 5 million 'lockings' (passages through locks) each year on our waterways

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